

ugvm

The Official uk.games.video.misc Magazine



Halo

The Best Xbox Title Yet?

Inside

ROUGH GUIDE

Get your friends into videogames

THE LYNX EFFECT

Birth to Grave with the Atari Lynx

TOP REVIEWS

11 pages of what's great and what ain't

SEAMAN DIARY

Continuing adventures under the sea

SEGA NOMAD

Game Gear on steroids?

The last
magazine you
need to buy,
FREE!

Issue 02

ugvm

...is a local magazine for local people. We'll have no trouble here!

Editor: deKay
Dep. Ed: Tim Miller
Teaboy: Jim Taylor

Contributors:

Leon Seaman
Mike Jenkins
Russell Marks
Angus MacCulloch
Michael Price
Russ Gray
Covert Badger
Andrew Hollingbury
Rev. Owen Allaway

ugvm
www.ugvm.org.uk
editor@ugvm.org.uk

Issue 02

Welcome

It seems you lot all liked the first issue of **ugvm**, so the team is back with Issue 02 for you to enjoy! We've had an enormous response to the magazine, with **700 downloads** of our launch issue in just a week. I doubt there are even that many people who frequent uk.games.video.misc, so word must have spread!



Enough about last month, then. What have we brought you this time around? How about an increase in size? Issue 02 is **60% bigger**, thanks to your generous offerings, especially in the review department. This means a whole **11 pages of reviews**, ranging from the low-key **Vexed** for PalmOS machines, to **Halo** - our cover game and the reason you want an Xbox.

Tim has been busy writing more great articles, such as his "**The Lynx Effect**" story of Atari's doomed handheld console, and a **Rough Guide to Videogames** - how to get your non-gaming chums hooked on mindless console enjoyment. We also have a great feature on the **Sega Nomad**, and the first of our now-regular series **My Top 5**. Add all this to the usual rabble and waffle that you obviously loved the first time round, simmer, and you'll see that these 32 pages are literally full to overflowing with tasty wordage. Break out your best reading cutlery, and tuck in!

deKay (Editor)

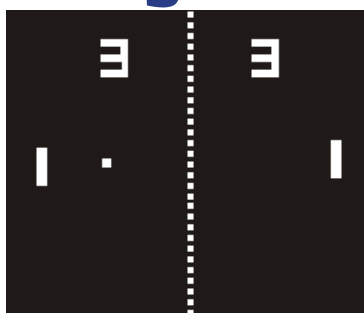
What's Inside This Issue...



The life and times of Atari's handheld
Page 6

The Lynx Effect

Rough Guide



Get your non-gamesplaying friends hooked on your addiction too
Page 9



Cover Story

Halo - why you need this game
Page 14

Sega Nomad

Getting along with Sega's mini-Megadrive
Page 23



Review Scores Explained

ugvm uses a marks-out-of-5 system for scoring games in the reviews. We feel that percentage systems are silly, with there being little difference between, say 75 and 76%. Marks out of 10 are often pointless as well, as very rarely do games score under 5 or 6/10. Having 5 points to the scale lets us get down to the nitty-gritty: is this game any good, or is it just a pile of old pants?

You can think of the scores as being roughly equivalent to these simple to digest phrases:

1/5 - "Not even worth a look"

2/5 - "Only think about it if you're a real fan of this type of game"

3/5 - "Average. Probably still playable, but not the best of it's kind"

4/5 - "A good game, perhaps with just one or two minor flaws"

5/5 - "You need to own this game. Now."



Awards

Games which score 4/5 also gain the coveted **ugvm Silver Award**, and games achieving the top marks of 5/5 are awarded the even more fantastic **ugvm Gold Award**. These awards are to show that these games really are something you want to play.



Comment

Don't Buy Games

Jim Taylor watches his pennies

Some of you may be aware of a website that's proposing that games today are far too expensive. Said site can be located at <http://www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk/>. According to the people behind it, backed up by quite a few readers of the Edge forums together with some of the people in the uk.games.video.* hierarchy, games should cost no more than £20-25. To try and prove this to the industry as a whole they are advocating a boycott on buying games between the 1st and 8th of December. If you think this is a worthy cause then all you need to do is simply not buy anything in that week (ignoring the rather poor release schedule anyway). They're hoping that the games industry will stand up and take note.

There's all sorts of discussion raging in uk.games.video.misc as I write this with some people arguing that it won't make the slightest bit of difference, that it'll be bad for the industry and so on. There are obvious parallels to the fuel blockades of a few years ago here, and you may recall what came out of that (answer: very little). However it's an interesting idea and I for one will be intrigued to see what, if anything, comes from it.

So, if you feel that £40-£45 is too much to pay for a game, let people know about this, spread the word to your friends & colleagues and let's see what may come of it.

Contents Regulars

Editorial	2
Comment	3
News	4
Reviews	12
Seaman Diary	26
My Top 5	28
Letters	30
Hold The Back Page	32
Next Issue	32

Features

The Lynx Effect	6
A Rough Guide to Videogames	9

Reviews

Metal Slug X (PSX)	12
Godzilla - The Series (GBC)	13
Halo (Xbox)	14
Mr. Driller (DC)	16
MotoGP (Xbox)	17
TOCA Race Driver (PS2)	18
Denki Blocks (GBA)	19
Gulroz Chang Poo (GBA)	20
Ridge Racer Type 4 (PSX)	21
Vexed (PalmOS)	21
Red Card (Xbox)	22

ugvm News

What we've been getting excited about in the ugvm newsgroup this month...

Rare Sold

Rumoured for a while, the buy-up of UK-based, Nintendo second-party developer Rare (who brought us Goldeneye, as if you need reminding) has finally been announced. Microsoft have seemingly stumped up \$375m, and removed a likely Gamecube-exclusive Perfect Dark followup from the release lists.



There was outcry on ugvm, but once it was realised that Rare haven't actually made a game in about three years, it was generally decided that it won't really affect anyone very much anyway.

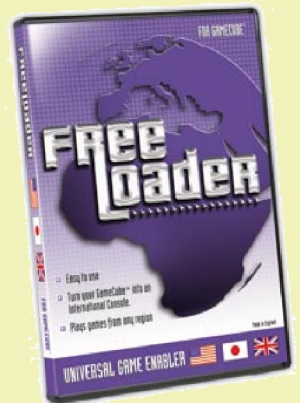
Besides, most of the Goldeneye and Perfect Dark team have left Rare anyway, coming up with the staggering Timesplitters 2 in time for Christmas.

Then followed rumours about Microsoft buying Capcom as well. We stand and wait.

Freeloader

Mainly a uk.games.video.gamecube topic this month, but the "will it, won't it" Freeloader discussion rages on. In case you didn't know, the Freeloader is a disc that lets you play US and Japanese games on your PAL Gamecube. Dattel (who make it) have gone blank on us, and rumours abound with "they can't produce the Gamecube discs", "Nintendo have shut it down", "It doesn't work with all games" and other such stuff.

Plenty of people imported Mario Sunshine and pre-ordered a Freeloader so they didn't have to wait until the PAL release of the game. Freeloader hasn't arrived yet, more than a month after its expected date, and Mario Sunshine PAL has. Cue angry importers.



www.codejunkies.com

Amazing Vanishing Websites

A startling phenomenon has occurred regarding online video game retailers this month. They've gone.

Not exactly entirely gone, but the sites are unreachable or not working properly. The first to be reported was trusty Hong Kong-based LikSang, which it now seems is due to Microsoft getting them closed for selling Xbox modchips.

Fellow HK outlet MicMic, has also gone, with just a note on the old site to say it's closed. Madeira Games (UK) is available, but appears now to be repairs and mod-only, with no sign of any games or consoles for sale.

If this continues, watch out for ugvm regulars collectively slashing their game-swollen wrists once DVD Box Office and Tronix vanish...



Probably The Best Games In The World...

Jim Taylor conducted a poll on the ugv* groups to see what gamers really believe the best games are, following the recent Edge forums published list.

This poll was to cover all games ever made, and the results were not really all that unexpected.

The final results were:

20. NiGHTS (Saturn)
19. Tetris (Arcade/GB)
18. Shenmue II (DC)
17. Virtua Tennis (DC)
16. Doom (PC)
15. Zelda: A Link to the Past (SNES)
14. Metal Gear Solid (PS)
13. ISS Pro Evolution Soccer (All versions) (PS2)
12. Resident Evil (PS)
11. Final Fantasy VII (PS)
10. Sensible Soccer (all variants) (Amiga)
9. Super Mario World (SNES)
8. Elite (Amiga/BBC/C64)
7. Goldeneye (N64)
6. Shenmue (DC)
5. Phantasy Star Online (DC)
4. Halo (Xbox)
3. GTA 3 (PS2)
2. Super Mario 64 (N64)
1. **Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (N64)**

Interestingly, the top two positions concur with the Edge Top 100.

Highlights included Sensible Soccer at number 10, Goldeneye at 7 and Halo at 4.

Sega had a good showing, with five first party games in the top 20, including both RPGs Shenmue and Shenmue II.



3



2



1

...Ever!

Rip Off Games

It seems like a great idea - boycott buying games for one of the busiest weeks in the video game industry (1st-8th December) and give the companies a kick in the wallet.

Hopefully, it'll encourage them to drop game prices; FairPlay suggest £20.

Although no-one seems to disagree that cheaper games is A Good Thing, some posters have the opinion that the logic behind it might not work. Halving the price of games may not double sales, simply because people can't spare the time to play twice as many games. It's certainly worth a try, anyway.

www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk



Each issue, **ugvm** looks at a console from the past. There's no way that anyone could possibly hope to own each and every gaming machine ever released - not even the BFI's got there yet, and they've been trying for years. This article should carry a health warning therefore: reading about other consoles could seriously damage your wallet.

The Lynx Effect

This issue, **Tim Miller** looks at the most capable of the handhelds that were around in the early 1990s. Which, naturally, disappeared.

Atari - one of the biggest names in games - wasn't the first with a portable console system. That much most people know, but you may be surprised with who was. The company was Epyx, and they'd designed the Lynx.

Rewind a little first. A lot, in fact - go back to 1981, when the Atari 2600 was the console to beat and Atari was riding high. Atari was newly owned by Warner Communications, and were looking to expand their product portfolio. Nolan Bushnell had a great idea - a portable version of the 2600. Not portable in the Gameboy sense, though - some designs for the 2200, as it was to be known, were simply a smaller 2600 with a handle on it. But some of Reagan Chang's designs had a detachable LCD screen and a battery pack, much in the form of Sony's new PSone. Some had in-built controllers. The 2200 was eventually scrapped in 1982, as Atari moved onto promoting their 7800. The idea of a portable videogames system didn't entirely die though.

Handy Andy

In 1986, the gaming market was relatively focussed on the battle between the 8-bit computers (CPC, C64 and Spectrum) and the 16-bit (Atari ST, Amiga)

computers. The NES and the Master System were burbling away in the console market, but Atari was interested in their computer. Jack Tramiel was head of Atari by this point, and his arrogance and belief in his own ideas had lead to Atari making several bad business decisions. Atari was not interested in consoles. Meanwhile, some of the engineers on the Amiga project had left and joined a small games company called Epyx.



Epyx had released several games for the 2600 and 7800, and were chiefly a software firm. Their new engineers had other ideas, though, and developed the Epyx Handy. This was a new concept in gaming - it was a console with a built-in screen, controls and power supply. It was just about small enough to fit in a pocket. It had controls that could be switched around, to allow left- and right-handed players equal platforms. And central to the idea, up to 16 of the devices could be linked to allow for competitive or cooperative games.

While the Handy was all ready to launch, Epyx was close to becoming bankrupt. In a desperate situation, they had no option but to sell the Handy technology to Atari, with Jack Tramiel getting a project he was interested in for a bargain price. In 1987, the project was renamed the Lynx, with reference to its connecting abilities.

Further Contacts

Atari 2200 concept drawings

can be found at <http://www.atari-history.com/videogames/2200/index.html>

Telegames

still releasing new games at <http://www.telegames.co.uk>

Handy Lynx Emulator

about the only way you'll get to play some of the games. But you can't take it on the bus... <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/dystopia/>

Games on the Go

So you've bought a Lynx and want to know what to play? Here are some of the better games ...



Chip's Challenge

A puzzle game where you push blocks, collect keys and chips, and open doors.



California Games

The first Lynx game available, and still a good multi-event sports game.



Klax

Possibly the best version of the conveyor belt puzzler.



Hard Drivin'

Not the best game, but impressive for its usage of polygons.



RoadBlasters

A driving game with that "just one more go" feeling.



Lemmings

It worked better on the Lynx's screen than any other handheld.

Sitting on a Goldmine

Had Atari released the Lynx there and then, videogaming history could have been very different. The machine was powerful, and technologically superb. There was no competition. For reasons that have never been explained, Jack Tramiel decided that the time wasn't right, and delayed the launch of the



system until 1989. By this time, Nintendo's Gameboy was on the horizon and technology had moved on. The Lynx was still impressive, but it had lost a little of its impact due to the new 16-bit consoles that were emerging.

The Lynx launched in two packs. The basic pack had just the system in it. The deluxe pack focussed on the connectivity of the console, including a ComLynx cable and California Games, a game which was playable by four players at a time. The console was backed with a large advertising campaign, which also concentrated on the linking aspect - schoolboys playing California Games in the school toilets, for example.

The system sold well initially, despite it costing almost £200 and having a poor build quality to it. The system's sales increased again when the Lynx II (although it was never officially called that, the remodelled Lynx is always known as such) was released in 1991. At the time, the Gulf War was



Little and Large

The not-even-almost pocket-sized Lynx (top), and the much smaller and more stylish Lynx II.

Aside from cosmetics, there were no real differences between the two revisions.



breaking out, and a game called Blue Lightning was released with the remodelled unit, allowing players to fly into Iraq and "do their own bit". The new machine had a better smaller shape, a clearer screen (with a "backlight off" switch), and looked set to garner more support from developers.

During 1992 and 1993, the Lynx sold well and was host to some quality games.

The Ideas Factory

After 1993, however, Atari were interested in more lofty things. Their Panther console was rumoured to play Lynx games on the TV, along with more advanced games. The Panther project turned into the Jaguar, which included a ComLynx gate in its architecture.

For Lynx owners, the number of false rumours was a great disappointment - at one point it looked as if a Jaguar could be linked to a Lynx to use the handheld as a controller, much as with the GC/GBA link now. As Atari shifted focus, it stopped advertising the Lynx. Retailers, already unhappy with Atari for their handling of the 7800, dropped the Lynx quickly.

By 1995, the handheld's shelf life was over. Since

then, a number of new games have been released. Telegames still stock the consoles and have been buying unfinished code to games that were cancelled half way through development (current thought is that there are close to 50 such games out there). And



recently, GAME in the UK stocked the Lynx in their stores when they bought thousands of units cheaply from Telegames. However, they priced the units too highly, and they didn't take off. If you're lucky, you can find some stock of games priced at 99p.

In the meantime, get eBaying...

A Rough Guide To Videogames

So, you've got a friend who's not part of the whole gaming 'culture'. He reads books, he watches films, he listens to music. But he's never got involved in gaming. This must change. Note that I'm calling him a him, but it's probably more likely to be a her!

The problem is, what games should you give him to get him started? While it's tempting to say that he needs to play GTA3, or Final Fantasy VII, these are pretty complex and not going to be the best place to start. In fact, a lot of games nowadays are difficult for a beginner to pick up – the control system alone can be pretty daunting, let alone the game rules. We're going to start off simple, then ...

First point of call is an early arcade game. Pong is ideal, but also consider **Pac-Man** or Space Invaders. Yes, the graphics aren't too impressive, but that's not the point. One of the best versions of these games I've found is Pac-Man on the **Neo-Geo Pocket Colour**, since the controls work really well. The point of this stage is to get your friend used to interacting with something.

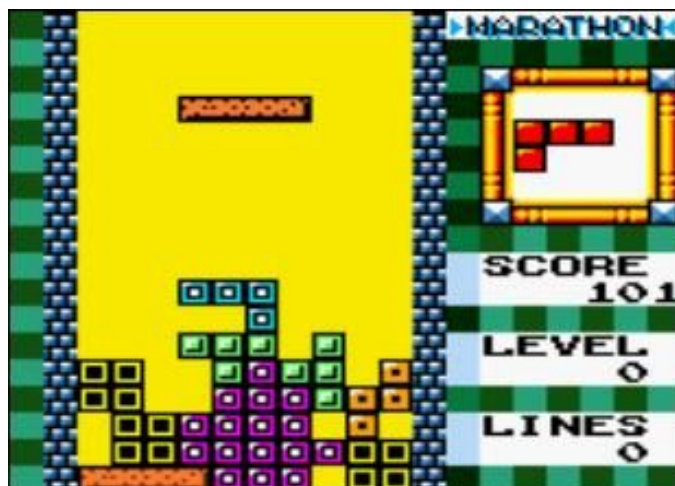


So, he's now used to using a controller to move something on screen. That is, believe it or not, the biggest hurdle out of the way. We'll now move on to a more complex game, with simple rules. Step

Tim Miller explains how to get your console-dodging friends "on the game"....



forward, **Tetris DX** on the **Gameboy Colour**. Any version of Tetris would be OK, but this one is more graphically pleasing. You'll have to explain the rules, of getting complete lines to disappear, but after that leave him to it for a week or so (another advantage of the GBC – you can leave it at his house!).



Feature

Since he can now control things and think about other things while doing it, we can move onto something requiring a little accuracy. I've found that the best game for this is **Super Mario Bros (NES)**, or maybe **Sonic (Megadrive)**. Preferably both. The point here is to keep the game rules simple, but to make them more comfortable with the idea of different types of games, and to install the idea of accuracy.



Now, no doubt your friend will be wondering why games are looking so primitive. You'll want to bring them bang up-to-date, but at the same time keep them comfortable with what they're doing. The best way to do this is through sport. You'll know what their favourite sport is; play the EA version of it (**FIFA 2002** on the **Playstation 2**, for example). The EA games are generally less deep, but more accessible – but they still have complex rules. And they look good.

Keeping with the up-to-date theme, move on to **Super Monkey Ball (Gamecube)**. This is included



mainly because it's great fun, but also because it's wrapping up everything we've done so far into one neat package. Simple controls and rules, a need for accuracy, thinking on your feet...



By now your friend should be enjoying himself. Time to move onto slightly deeper games. The control that Super Monkey Ball has given him will allow him to get into racing games a little more, since these are often difficult for a beginner to pick up. I feel the best one



for an absolute beginner is **Le Mans 24H** on the **Dreamcast**. To start with, you can turn all driving aids (such as braking and steering) on, and do pretty well at the game within a few goes. Then move onto the intermediate mode. It's a very good-looking game, and has a good extended play mode in it too. This, along with Mario or Sonic, will contribute to the idea that games aren't all just short experiences.

We'll further reinforce this view by getting them to play **Super Mario 64** on the **Nintendo 64**. This game is, as we all know, a work of genius. You will have to explain the controls a little, and then give your friend the machine to play on for a few weeks. This is precious time, it's when your friend doesn't have 101 other games to play and can take time to really enjoy Mario's world. This game introduces so many new things – the idea of a large overall goal achieved through lots of small ones; the use of a free-roaming 3D world; the idea of a storyline ... actually, forget that last one.



Now, your friend is ready for more complex games. Time for an RPG, but these can be horrendously complicated. It's probably not a good idea to drop him into a Final Fantasy just yet, and even Shenmue (Dreamcast) is going a bit far. We'll have a stopping-



off point, therefore, and go via the adventure game genre. Load up **Legend of Zelda (SNES)** and give him time to get used to the story-telling, the exploration, the use of items, and the idea of becoming immersed in another world. This is one of the most important parts of gaming.

A step further towards the RPG, we have **Shining Force (Megadrive)** – or if you prefer, Shining Force 3 on the **Saturn**. We're now in proper hardcore gaming territory, with very complicated rules, being thrown in at the deep end of the game, and having to work out almost everything yourself. Turn-based combat means that clever strategies are needed, and a lot of chess-like thinking is needed.



Your friend is now proficient at games, interested in games ... he's a gamer, well done. For the final game, pick your favourite, and play him at it. Don't lose. The multiplayer aspect of gaming's a very important one, and this will just go to show him that he's got a way to go before he can call himself an expert! Oh, and make sure he plays **Phantasy Star Online (Dreamcast)**. If there's one game guaranteed to cause addiction, it's that one.



Happy assimilating!

The side scrolling 2D shooter is alive and well on the Neo Geo (mainly because that's about all it can manage these days), and here we have a port of one of the more recent in the long-running Metal Slug series to the Playstation. Metal Slug X, like the rest of the series, is a Contra style shooter, your character (from a choice of four) ventures from start to finish of the left-to-right scrolling levels with the aim of destroying pretty much everything that moves.

The "gimmick", if you will, in Metal Slug X is the Super Vehicle of the game's subtitle. At various points in the game you get to commandeer one of a selection of vehicles, which serve to increase your firepower and also allow you to take more hits before you die. Other power-ups include weapon and health boosts, obtained by rescuing hostages and lost explorers.

Mike Jenkins is confused as to why this game isn't metal, and there are no slugs in it, despite the name.

Metal Slug X

Metal Slug X is a pretty game. The animation of the characters and background scenery has always been a defining point of the series, and this game is no exception, with lots of nice little graphical touches that give it a very polished feel. Comparing the game graphically to the original, however, it comes off slightly worse. Due to the famous inadequacies of the Playstation 2D hardware, the animation has lost frames, and the colours look generally muddier than the Neo-Geo version. There is, however, no slowdown to speak of, which is a win for the PS version.



Sonically you have the standard bangs and booms, chirpy jumpy Neo Geo music. However it seems that the sound has been recorded at a low sample rate as the overall quality is low and somewhat muffled, indeed lower than the Neo-Geo version. The load times that are inevitably going to be introduced in a cartridge to CD conversion are there, but mercifully are relatively infrequent and take at most 5 or 6 seconds.



The big problem with this game, and one that for me kills the undoubted fun the generally competent shooty action has to offer, is the difficulty. The game is stupidly hard. The controls are a major contributor to the frustration - your character can shoot left, right, up or down but not diagonally which means you have to get directly underneath flying baddies to kill them, which in turn means that the baddies swarming to your left and right will kill you. The Super Vehicles are controlled in a way that results in you not being able to aim independently of moving, which as well as leaving you a sitting duck to the enemy, will often send you blundering into a boss or pit as you struggle to survive the onslaught of soldiers, mummies etc.



Boss fights are the prime offenders in terms of game dishonesty. You simply cannot beat them without dying many times through no fault of your own - you have no chance of avoiding their attacks. However,

you will eventually get past them through use of the infinite continues, meaning you will probably finish the game on your first go if you have the patience. If you restrict the number of continues in an effort to increase the longevity, you will go mad with frustration. The collision detection is also suspect, and the controls seem generally spongy, if not quite unresponsive.

Once you finish the game (which took me about 40 minutes), you get an extra "another mission" mode which gives you various tasks and is amusing for a few minutes. You also have a gallery of arty pictures of the game characters, and a training mode. And that's your lot for extra value.

The game is generally fun while it lasts. But you will have seen all of it in an hour, unless you limit your continue use. Then you will throw the joypad at the wall due to its insane and unfair difficulty level.

1/5

GBC

Review

Godzilla: The Series

"Monster Monster!" yells **deKay**. Please just ignore him...

I've played quite a few Godzilla games before, and none of them have been any good. The NES "Godzilla - Master Of Monsters" was perhaps the worst, but this is almost as bad.

You control Godzilla (who is now a goodie, not a baddie like in the Matthew Broderick film on which the series is based). Well, you control his neck and tail - the rest just trundles along on its own. Aim his head up! Aim it down! Shoot stuff with strange green blobs (phlegm?) that come out of his mouth! Whip stuff with his tail, so slowly that you get shot before you hit anything! Cover your face! Hours of fun. Well, minutes of boredom before switching it off.

And that's basically all there is to the game. It really is as tedious as it sounds, with level after level of



crap left-to-right scrolly 'action', broken up with cut scenes and end of level baddies (who are so easy to beat you can do it blindfolded). They're not even that well drawn.

In fact, only Godzilla himself is good to look at, and is well animated. His head moves smoothly up and down, and his tail swishes fluidly. Sadly, everything else is poorly drawn, with few or no frames of animation to speak of. Helicopters look worse than in the original Choplifter game, and explosions are feeble. It's almost laughable.

Even the backgrounds are pretty non-descript, and look like they've been ripped straight out of Rampage.

There really is very little positive to say about this game, and I doubt even fans of the series will like it.

1/5



What can I say about Halo that hasn't already been said? Due to the hype surrounding this game that has been built up, and the press coverage it has seen, the answer is: not much, hence the relative brevity of this review.

What I can say however, is that it's good. Very good. But the best game ever? Well now you enter a tricky area, one which may very well be discussed upon in this tome at a later date, preferably by someone far more productive than I (yes I mean you Tim Miller). Anyway, Halo then.

There has been discussion all over the net ever since the Xbox's release as to just how good this game is, some have voiced their complaints as to the lack of variety of enemies, despite the fact that most FPS games feature people. And nothing else.

There is also the "sameness" of the textures, and the repetition of the levels. But it is with this last complaint, dear reader, the naysayers perhaps have a point, with Assault on the Control Room being a prime example of the same rooms time after time. However each of these are minor nitpicks and, for most people, do not detract from the overall thrill of the game.

Halo

Jim Taylor gets all angelic about what could well be the best game the Xbox has seen since launch day.



Mike Jenkins gives his take...

Halo is the big one - the main reason most people will have bought their Xbox (and indeed still the main reason most people will buy an Xbox) A console first person shooter (FPS) game that has been designed to work with a joypad and not had its control system butchered down from a keyboard and mouse. A console FPS running on almost PC level hardware. On paper all looks rather exciting.

Fortunately, Halo delivers. The level designs are varied, and fiendishly clever in places, the environments go from claustrophobic spaceship interiors to dense and humid jungle, to cavernous and incredibly creepy abandoned structures. The controls work perfectly on the Xbox joypad. The 5.1 sound is superb, with well-placed musical scores to notch up the tension at appropriate moments. The graphics are jolly nice, although the frame rate collapses at times.

The most impressive aspect of Halo for me is the intelligence of the enemies. While you don't have all that many different types of baddie against you, providing you play it at Heroic difficulty or above, they are all incredibly sneaky bastards and they will evade and attack with almost believable cunning. Seeing as you spend most of your time in FPS games killing computer generated bad guys, the AI is exceptionally important and is often neglected. Halo gets it just right, and it lifts it head and shoulders above any other single player game of this type I have played. Decide to play it with some other humans in cooperative mode, and you have a

Are you really worried that you've seen the same pattern on a wall as you're leaping over a hill in your Warthog as your trusty gunner blows all hell out of the enemies chasing after you? Do you find yourself dejected after wiping out a room full of Flood and just scraping through with your energy half intact just because it's the same layout as the previous room? If so then you really should give up gaming now.

Halo is a sublime experience, one filled with wide-eyed wonder as you storm the beach of The Silent Cartographer with marines in tow gunning down all in your path. It's a game filled with nuance and excitement as you discover that, with one well-placed bullet, you can take out a Hunter in one shot, but to do that you need to sneak up on this mighty behemoth and hope he doesn't spot you.

It's an experience that most will not soon forget and one that draws you back in time and time again. The Silent Cartographer has been played over and over and yet I never tire of developing new strategies and



weekend killer on your hands.

Of course, nothing is perfect, and Halo has its little blemishes. As mentioned, the frame rate suffers with a lot going on, which considering the power of the platform it runs on is a bit puzzling - it never drops to levels where your performance is affected by it however. It lurches like a drunken ape if you run it in PAL60 mode (so don't). It needs to be played on Heroic difficulty to really shine, as the baddies lose a lot of their cunning below that. The control of the vehicles you get to commandeer in the game leaves a little to be desired. The deathmatch game has no computer opponents so feels terribly empty. And one of the later levels goes on for an awfully long time with little variation in the design.

However, all of these faults are really niggles, and Halo is almost worth buying an Xbox for.

4/5

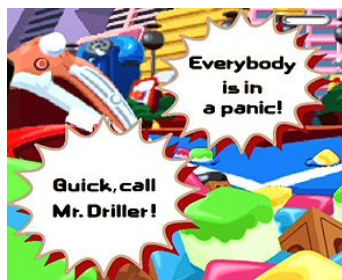


storming the inner complex time and time again. It's a game that draws you in and holds you there until you've wrung every last drop of entertainment from it. And then you go back for more.

5/5

ugvm
Gold Award





Mr. Driller

Russell Marks goes at it like a pneumatic drill. No, really: he's supposed to, apparently.

With Namco's first Dreamcast release being *Soul Calibur*, it's safe to say that few would have bet on an obscure 2D pseudo-puzzle-game as a followup. But there it was - *Mr. Driller*.

As the slightly contrived plot goes, the town has been overrun by blocks coming from deep underground. As *Mr. Driller*, you drill into the blocks, with connected blocks of the same colour disappearing as if they were a single block. Any blocks above wobble for a moment before falling. When they fall, any groups of two or more blocks stick together, and any groups of four or more blocks disappear. Good that it's not complicated, or anything.

It's a bit like playing *Dig Dug* in the middle of a game of Tetris, but not quite. The blocks are already there, packed together - they don't actually fall until you make them. This is a bit of a problem given that you want to drill down through them to the bottom without dying, and that.

The obvious ways to deal with this are to just dig straight down, or take it very slowly and carefully.



And to stop you doing either, you get a limited air supply (with air icons to pick up), and there are "X" blocks which lose you 20% of your air if you drill into them. Bah.

Playing the game ends up as a combination of drilling, avoiding the falling blocks, occasionally trying to get a 'chain' in the "X" blocks above to free up air icons without accidentally killing yourself in the process, and slowly going insane from the constant mad speed of it all. In fact, *Mr. Driller* has an intensity to it that I can only compare to *Robotron* - high speed, split-second decisions, short intense games.

Predictably enough, the graphics tend slightly towards the plain and functional. The music, on the other hand, is remarkably good. For a game this obscure to get this sort of music is, frankly, amazing. Still, it's there, and it really does add to things.



For all the positives, the game does have its problems. Most noticeable is the lack of a two-player mode. There's a lack of modes generally - you have the basic Beginner/Expert games over a fixed distance, the single-life Survival mode, and a Time Attack mode on preset levels (which gets fiendishly hard). So once you finish both the Expert and Time Attack modes, there isn't really all that much to bring you back, even if it is still fun to hammer away at Expert or Survival.

Overall though, *Mr. Driller* is a great game, and it's well worth tracking down either the Dreamcast or the (supposedly identical) Playstation version.





MotoGP

Sitting astride a roaring engine with wheels, **Russ Gray** can do nothing but Hang On... (Groan. Ed.)

Motorbikes rock. Huge, powerful, loud, two-wheeled rockets; an idling litbike has the same sense of latent power and danger as a tiger sleeping with one eye open. I like them. A lot.

Sadly, motorbike games, as a rule, haven't quite matched up - there have been some gems like Excitebike64 and the original Megadrive Road Rash, but they've never really got the FEEL of motorcycling down in the way that Wave Race did for jet skiing. Until now, that is, because MotoGP on the Xbox is fantastic.

The first thing that marks MotoGP out as a bit special is the control method which allows you to do cool stuff other than just ride the bike. Huge wheelies, doughnuts, burnouts (both rolling and static), stoppies, and so on are all possible by correctly shifting the rider's weight and applying the front and/or rear brakes as appropriate.

Even better, the training mode teaches you how to be so irresponsible, and the arcade mode rewards you for it, with unlockable video footage, mirror tracks, new leathers and bike designs, and loads of other stuff.



The meat of the game is the season mode, which enables you and your custom rider to participate in a full MotoGP season of ten races, with practice, qualifying, and everything. Along with championship points depending on your finishing position, you are also awarded stat points to improve your biker's cornering, braking, top speed etc.

The races themselves are a marvel, with tons of opponents on the track, massive draw distances, the most gorgeous tracks ever (the sunlight falling on the tarmac looks astonishing), 5.1 sound, the animation on the bikes and riders, it's all just too much. And the motion blur when you approach top speed is breathtaking - it's like the hyperthrust sequences in Streethawk, and because it's harder to judge an approaching corner because of the blur you get just about the right mix of fear and panic that a real rider would get for riding at that speed on two wheels. It's a wonderful touch. It's also more satisfying than any car racing game I've played. There's just something about sweeping round a corner perfectly, knee on the tarmac, racing line spot-on, speed exactly right, then accelerating smoothly out and popping a wheelie over the line to win, that can't be matched on four wheels.



Even when you've earned yourself a nice lead and there are no other bikes on screen, you get a great sense of fulfilment from just hooning around the track. The only fault with the game is the occasionally unpredictable result of making contact with another bike, but then you shouldn't be doing that anyway, and you'll soon learn to out-brake rivals into corners and overtake them with style and grace. This is a keeper.



TOCA Race Driver

Much like in real life, **Angus MacCulloch** flings a car round some roads with scant regard for his own safety. In this game, though, he doesn't drive a Lada...



This is the fourth in the TOCA series of racing games produced by Codemasters and follows the evolutionary path set out by its previous incarnations on the PSX. Concern was voiced prior to the release of the game after a technically flawed demo and the lack of pre-release reviews. Thankfully those fears were largely unfounded.

The major new innovation in the first 'next gen' TOCA game is probably its most controversial, that of a 'Story' based structure. While the progression from rookie driver to World Champion is through various Championships unlocked by gaining points, much as in TOCA WTC in 2000, there is also a FMV 'story' which follows the career of the game's driver protagonist



'Ryan McKane'. That story is largely told through cut scenes at the beginning and end of championships. While this is a new take on the racing game genre it doesn't add particularly much to the gameplay. The story doesn't alter qualitatively depending on your progress and isn't helped by being rather formulaic.

On the more traditional gameplay side the game has much to commend it. There are 38 real tracks to race, arranged in various licensed portrayals of real world race series. In each of the series a relevant selection of cars are also available, but in career mode you are restricted to the cars run by the teams who offer you a seat. The level of realism has always been important to the TOCA series and differentiates



it from games such as GT3. The focus of the game is very much on real world racing. The handling model is good, with the cars reacting as you would expect from over-enthusiasm with the accelerator or brake. The car handling is also effected by any changes to the set up made prior to the commencement of a race. But it is during races against the CPU opponents that the games true strength becomes apparent. The AI exhibited by the CPU opponents is some of the best seen in console gaming. They will block your line if you try and slipstream past them, they will take a defensive line into a corner, and if you get alongside them they have no problems with nudging you off the tarmac into a wall of a gravel trap. In short the CPU can and will employ all the tricks that you would expect from another player. Even more convincing, and entertaining, is the fact the if put under pressure the CPU cars may well out brake themselves going into a corner and sail off into a gravel trap. The move away from CPU cars which slavishly following the racing line is the strongest suit

of this series and makes the 'racing' experience in TOCA Race Driver second to none.

But of course the experience isn't always as positive. The code required to produce such good AI means that the processor isn't just churning out polygons, and that become clear when you look at the graphics. The car models and decals are good, but the level of detail, particularly texture depth, in the tracks themselves and in the trackside objects is low. The game therefore appears rather washed out and bland. It will be up to the individual to decide whether this graphical hit is balanced out by the extra gameplay, but in the heat of a race few have the opportunity to notice the low number of trees in the middle distance.



The TOCA series has always been the 'realistic' competition to the graphically superior GT games and the PS2 versions of both continues that tradition, while TOCA Race Driver loses out in the graphical stakes it makes up for it in real tracks and race series and in pure racing fun.



GBA

Review

Denki Blocks

Jim Taylor always dreamt he could push boxes round for a living. Now he works at Asda.

Having originally played this via Sky's interactive service I was sufficiently motivated to pick it up for a mere £15 from WH Smith and I'm very glad I did. It's a deceptively simple puzzle game that plays a bit like perennial shareware favourite Sokoban. Essentially you have to move a set of coloured blocks around until they stick together. Except you move all the blocks at the same time. Unless there's something in the way. It's not that easy to explain, in fact I suggest that you head on over to Rage's website (www.rage.com/denki/website/demo/game.html) and try out the shockwave trial version.

The graphics are simple but have a certain charm to them and there are numerous play modes meaning that should you get stuck there's always another mode to go over to until you are ready to re-tackle. And believe me you will get stuck. It all starts off easily enough but the levels start to get more fiendish as you go on; fortunately the difficulty level is perfectly pitched. For people who want something a bit more sedate than Chu Chu Rocket but who still enjoy a damn good challenge I recommend you seek this out.





Gulroz Chang Poo

Ducks, pots, bizarre stuff and more ducks. **Andrew Hollingbury** has been eating cheese before bedtime.

Imagine, if you will, two small ducks. Imagine, then, that these two small ducks have a blue pot with pieces of various pictures inside it. If your imagination will stretch further, then think of these two small ducks, with their blue pot, running around saving fellow ducks from various life threatening problems (such as excess hair growth and stuck pickle jar lids) by completing pictures using their blue pot. Why do they bother with plots in puzzle games?

Anyway, this appears to be the background behind Gulroz Chang Poo, a bizarre little game from Compile. Each puzzle is a grid with various blocks on, and spaces which are indicated as needing filling in order to complete the picture. You can rotate the grid in ninety degree turns, and shoot blocks from the aforementioned pot (accompanied by cute little grunts, groans and weird expressions from the stumpy little ducks). Blocks can only be attached to other blocks, and you have a set number of blocks on each level, enough to fill all the indicated spaces. The levels are further complicated by holes in the grid (which may be shot across, but not onto), and rubber blocks (which deflect anything shot at them). Each puzzle completed earns you a point, which are needed to unlock each "rescue"'s final puzzle - solving these gives your ducks the required object to aid the other ducks.

The graphics are fine - bright and cheery, although



quite pixellated when you solve each puzzle (as the produced picture zooms into focus). The music is bubbly without being too annoying (although it is the same music in each puzzle save the end ones) and is accompanied by various burbling sound effects which aren't too ingratiating.

Most importantly, it has that all important "hook". Although there is never the sense of urgency that Tetris and Puzzle Bobble supply, as there is no threat of death, the maddening frustration of getting close to finishing the puzzle definitely keeps you coming back.

Although the "plot" is entirely in Japanese, there's plenty of English text so navigating menus etc. is easy or simple enough to work out. While possibly not to everyone's taste - as with any puzzle game - and probably not as addictive as Tetris, the fast-paced puzzling on offer is superlative to most recent attempts at the genre - dare I say better than Bust-A-Move?

4/5

ugvm

Silver Award



Ridge Racer Type 4

Russell Marks races some ridges. Whatever that might mean.

Ridge Racer Type 4 was the last in the series to be released on the Playstation. And like the first, it's a game which takes a perverse delight in its combination of quite realistic graphics - still some of the best on the PS - and wildly unrealistic arcadey handling.

The improvements on previous Ridge Racer games are obvious. The graphics suggest a Gran Turismo influence, and there are more tracks than ever before, though some are used more than once. But there are changes that even fans of the series might have problems with, such as the tedious 'story' element. You have to pile through several screens furthering the predictable, paper-thin plot before you can get to the next race.

When you finally get past the story screens, it's playable enough. But it's much too easy; I finished with the medium-difficulty team on my first go, and the hard-difficulty one soon after. This is hardly surprising, as it gives you four attempts at every



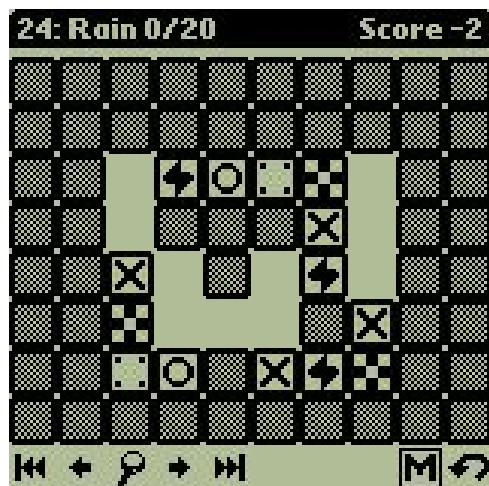
single race, and even lets you save your progress mid-game!

Really, if you want a Ridge Racer game for the PS, you're better off with Rage Racer. And if you want a more challenging driving game, get Colin McRae Rally. Only fans and completists need bother with Ridge Racer Type 4.

3/5

PALMOS

Review



Vexed

Playing a Palm puzzler, **Russell Marks** picked a pick of pickled peppers.

Let's face it, Palms aren't exactly Gameboy material. The buttons on them are barely usable for action games. The better Palm games tend to be turn-based, or controlled with the pen - or both, like Vexed.

The gameplay in Vexed is clearly pinched from Taito's old arcade game Puzznic. You slide blocks around, and when matching blocks touch they disappear. When all the blocks disappear, you clear the level. This is as easy as it sounds for the first few levels, but the levels get harder. To say the least.

So yes, it's just a Puzznic clone. No big deal, right? Well, for some reason this version just works, in a way Puzznic never did.

Maybe it's the sheer number of levels. Maybe it's the lack of annoyances like constantly-

moving blocks, or a time limit. Or even the way you drag the blocks around with the pen, rather than messing around with a cursor. There's also the inspired scoring scheme, which lets you see how you're doing in a much more subtle way than simply knowing how many levels you've cleared.

Whatever it is, Vexed has it. Once you start puzzling through the levels, it's hard to stop.

4/5

ugvm

Silver Award



Red Card

We always knew **Michael Price** never played fair. That's why he runs Cyberscore...

Football. Some people call it the "beautiful game". Midway have set out to dispel this myth with the release of Redcard, which is billed as the same game - with different rules.

No need to explain a plot here - it's a football game! You know how it works, two teams, 11 players, kick a ball around a pitch trying to score goals. Occasionally you'll get tackled or challenged for the spheroid at your feet - and this is where the Redcard essence comes into play.

Redcard's "different" rules simply involve the, shall we say, lenient nature of the referee who is willing to let you get away with pretty much anything. The game plays like a 21st century update of arcade classic Euro Football Champ, which allowed you to knee players, knock them down with karate kicks and even tackle the referee. Redcard allows all of this, and throws in some headbutts for good measure.



The graphics are, at best, respectable. They're not going to set the world alight on any platform and the facial mapping is mostly very poor. The animation is also ludicrously OTT, perhaps to emphasise the nature of the game itself.

The controls are fairly simple - you've got pass, shoot, lob, tackle and sprint, as per usual. The left trigger activates the special moves, which are earned by building up a "1-2-3-4" bar for your team through the use of keeping the ball or scoring goals. Each special move uses a chunk of this bar. The special moves include kung-fu tackles, headbutts, flying leaps to evade tackles, and extra bursts of speed.

The one which is highly likely to be most frequently used will be the super shot - it uses all 4 bars of your special ability, but when executed the whole game slows down and goes into a bullet time-esque sequence which sees the camera rotate around your player as he prepares an unstoppable drive - if the keeper catches it, all too often he will fly through the net, ball in hand.

The game features a small number of modes - you've got friendlies or a world conquest, which sees you travelling the world taking on teams with the express intention of beating as many as possible and qualifying for the finals. Along your way you'll face a team of penguins (yes, PENGUINS), and seals. No, this time, I mean Navy Seals.

Particular kudos needs to be given to the commentary, which is excellent and among the best I've heard in a football game. The comments are on topic, and utterly seamless. This is perhaps aided by never mentioning a player by name, but you won't notice after a while - it's top notch stuff. The various stadia included in the game (taken from the World Cup) are also very well recreated.

Out on the pitch, the game plays quite well and you can string together decent passing moves once you adjust to the controls. A sore point is the awful, awful keepers. While it's nice to score from 30 yards out two or three times a game, any sense of quality is taken away when you realise the keeper has usually dived for the ball as it leaves your foot, and is thusly already on the floor as the ball sails over him.

It's a hilarious 90 minutes though, and the fun increases exponentially in accordance with the number of people you have gathered around playing at the same time. There's no greater satisfaction than allowing your mates the time and space to think they've hit a bullet time stunner, only to kung-fu them into a sorry heap just as they hit the button, leaving them with an empty special bar, an injured player, and very, VERY hurt pride.

Redcard is a fine kickabout and probably the best football game on the X-Box so far (ooo, controversial) - the over-the-top stylings won't please everyone, but it'll keep anyone else in football boots until Konami decide to bring Pro Evolution Soccer to the X-Box, or the next yearly "update" of FIFA shows up.



Sega Nomad

Leon Seaman has a (Sega Megadrive) Mini Adventure...

I remember way back in the days of Games Master on Channel 4, with Dominic Diamond as the presenter, a news item about an improved Sega Game Gear that was being produced. Apparently, it would play Sega Megadrive/Genesis games. As a Game Gear and SNES owner I was overjoyed with this. However, the product never materialised over here and was limited to the US market, thus I was not going to get my hands on one...

Well, not until several years later. Whilst looking through eBay's gaming section I came across an auction for a Sega Nomad, but at first I didn't realize this was the name of the console I had craved so many years before. As I read the description I remembered thinking to myself how I had always wanted one. Now it was sitting in front of me, with a "Buy It Now!" price too. Then I saw that the price was around £150... talk about burnt fingers!

I initially set off to find some resources on the internet, to help guide me through buying a Nomad, and what I would need or look out for. After asking around several places I was directed to uk.games.video.misc, where I found a helpful and well informed group of strangers! (That'd be us then! Ed.)

Two weeks later I had managed to pick one up for around £80 from a US auctioneer complete with battery pack. For some reason they didn't come with a battery pack as standard - I believe that this was a separate purchase around the \$30-50 mark in the States, so I was really pleased to be getting this at the same time as the console.

The pack basically clips onto the back of the Nomad and holds 6 AA batteries allowing the Nomad to

become portable. A portable Megadrive.

Waiting a week or so for my Sega Nomad to arrive from the States I visited various local car boot sales trying to find a Megadrive 2 power adapter to power it through the mains. This is the only Megadrive power adapter that would work on the Nomad, it should be noted that the Sega Game Gear power adapter would not work.

I came back home with around 15 games, a Megadrive 2, 4 joypads, RF cable and the power adapter for a tenner. Car boots are great!

I played the Megadrive for a bit, testing the games worked, I was warped back into a time of nasty borders and fizzy colours on the screen - was this really what the Megadrive was like? I was disappointed on my first play, although I was going through the games with what (in my opinion) would be the worst first, finishing with the star of the show (Sonic). By the time I'd got to Sonic I had

warmed to the borders and was happily playing Sonic & Knuckles. At this point I was wondering whether I had made the right decision buying the Sega Nomad, due to the Megadrive not being quite as great as I remembered.

I received the Nomad with no problems the next week during lunch break at work, drove home and got my car boot bargain Megadrive games and bought them back to work with 6 Ni-cads that I had charged in anticipation for this day. Disappearing to the toilet at work with the Nomad, battery pack and Sonic, I sat playing it for a while, well for about an hour... I was amazed at how much better it looked on this small screen, and there was not a border in sight like on the Megadrive. I was impressed and couldn't wait to get it home and play FIFA 98 and some RPGs in bed with the lights out.

If you are used to the Gameboy Advance it feels like a brick in comparison, the Game Cartridges are nearly as big as the Gameboy



Hardware Report

itself! But there's something about the chunkiness of it that I like. It feels like a professional piece of equipment, a collectors piece, rather than just a toy.

My first set of batteries were some Uniross 500mAH Ni-Cad AA batteries, these lasted about an hour, which was initially quite disappointing as I was having to carry around 12 batteries just to get 2 hours uninterrupted play from it. I was shopping in Asda of all places, when I saw that they had some Camlink Ni-Mh batteries, I

played within the first days of charging. This is what the Gameboy Advance achieves on 2 AAs unfortunately, but when out fishing 7 hours is plenty between bites!

The screen is far better in terms of visibility than the Gameboy Advance, I think this is probably due to the backlight. It is terrible in direct sunlight with the sun's reflections on the screen, although it doesn't take much just to tilt it away from the sun, so this isn't a problem really.

use to define a region). It turned out that the guy who wrote the article was also a UGVM regular and he gave me a fair amount of help explaining the workings of the mod and I installed it with ease within about 20 minutes.

It should be noted that the only game (out of around 20) that I have had a problem with region protection so far was FIFA 98, which would not go beyond the Sega start-up screen. This can now be bypassed by switching to 50hz mode (UK) during the startup, and then returning back to 60hz mode afterwards.

The cartridges can sometimes be a pain to work, especially if they are old and it seems to me that some of the games do not get a tight connection to the Nomad and freeze or lock up during play if the console is shaken. This can be remedied by checking that the slots on the game cartridge are clean, and also by inserting the cartridge fully and then removing it slightly, this creates a stronger hold on the Game cartridge.

The Sega Nomad features a six-button joypad which I found easy to use from day one. However, I also find the Xbox controller comfortable to use (unlike some other people), so the Nomad may not suit all hands. For six-button intolerant games (very few) there is a mode switch which disables the X, Y and Z buttons. If you make the 50/60hz modification then you have the option to use the mode button as the 50/60hz switch, I chose this option as I didn't want to insert my own switch or button on the case.

6-button intolerant games are listed on various sites and as I knew that I would not be interested in them, I now use the mode button just to play FIFA 98. However, I am sure that some games I buy in the future will need me to do this too.

Due to the Nomad running at 60hz and UK games traditionally playing



had heard about these before from the aspect that they didn't have a memory like Ni-Cads, but I didn't realise that they also had a higher amphourage. I was getting over 2 hours play from the new 6x1200mAH Ni-Mhs and was very impressed with the increased battery life, and also a significantly longer 'battery low' warning display.

I have since ordered 6x1800mAH AA batteries and they give me around 3.5 hours play on one charge, which is fine with me as I never play for that long even on mains power. This means two sets (12 batteries) would provide you with 7 hours play, providing you

Portability wise, unless you wear VERY baggy jeans you would have a problem squeezing it in your pocket. I managed to modify a Sega Game Gear carry case to keep it safe, as I like to take it out with me when I go skating or fishing. There's a certain happiness I get from sitting in a tent by a lake playing my Nomad, or nursing an injury playing John Madden.

Due to the Nomad being a Sega Genesis (US Megadrive) it doesn't play UK games if region protection has been incorporated into them. Luckily I found a great document online to install a 50/60hz modification (50/60Hz detection is what the protected games usually

on 50hz bordered systems, a few games speed up by around 20%. I believe they were originally designed to run at these speeds, but if the speed becomes a problem then you can stick the 50hz mode button down with a bit of tape to keep 50hz mode enabled. This also brings back the top and bottom borders and squashes the on screen display, just how you would remember your Megadrive in the 90s... How did they get away with that, eh?

You can usually tell when a game is running too fast as the music on main menus plays noticeably too fast. I use to stick down the Mode button but I play them all at 60hz now - it's fine when you get used to it and it beats borders any day!

Another concern of mine when reading articles regarding the Sega Nomad handheld, was whether the screen had a tendency to blur when fast moving objects were displayed. I was very pleased with the results when playing Sonic for the first time. Yes, there is a very slight blur there, but it doesn't affect gameplay at all and I've seen worse playing MAME on a Laptop TFT screen. The only game whereby fast moving objects are hard to see are on 'Shadow of the Beast' but I remember this being damn hard on a TV screen anyway.

Considering that the games were designed to be displayed on a TV, all text is easily readable and games still retain the depth of view of a game being played on a TV screen. I find that the GBA and Game Gear tend to blow the graphics up to make them easier to view (if you ever play ISS on a GBA you'll see what I mean), and as a result you can't see much of the surroundings.

There is a protective layer over the front of the screen which can be replaced for a few pounds from eBay if nasty scratches appear on it. I have a few scratches, but these are only visible when the Nomad is turned off. You would need a BIG scratch for it to affect gaming during play in anyway!

The Sega Nomad also has the same Video/Multi-Out port as the Megadrive 2 systems so can be plugged directly into your TV and play it as you would a Megadrive. The TV has to be capable of displaying an NTSC (American standard) image I believe, and it also has to be displayed through a SCART/RGB cable. I have not managed to try this out yet as I only have an RF Lead and this only provides me with a black and white image due to the NTSC/PAL differences.



The Nomad also has a Stereo Headphone Socket, and you don't need much volume when using headphones (good on the batteries). I have noticed a fair amount of hiss when turning the volume up to full using speaker or headphones, but this is only noticeable on quiet sections.

At the bottom of the Nomad there is a standard Megadrive controller port for 2 player games. I have played Columns, John Madden's Football, Sonic 2 and Pit Fighter like this and it seems fine. My 9 year old nephews enjoyed a two player game on Sonic with it, and instantly wanted to swap it with their GBAs!

The Nomad is a great handheld and it has so many things going for it, and there are probably only two minuses, those being battery life and portability. But to be honest, not one of my mates who own Gameboys take them out of the house, and if they did I couldn't imagine them just slipping it in their pocket as it would scratch the screen and probably get broken, so how portable are both these systems really?

If you want something different, and something that is going to be collectable, whilst at the same being something that you can appreciate game-wise, then the Nomad is for you, all those Megadrive and Genesis games at those bargain prices was too much for me to resist.



Seaman Diary (part 2)

The next episode of **Rev. Owen Allaway's** Seaman diary features graphic death, suspense, tickling, and some gender confusion.

Sunday Morning

Can remember that my Gillman were talking, but cannot remember what they said. Stagger to sofa. I feel unwell, but I must check up on my Gillmen. They are talking in childish voices, but they are really talking! Not about much, but now I can tell if they need anything.

Find out that the tank is still too hot. Last night I managed to turn the heat up way too far and it still hasn't cooled down to comfortable levels. Oops. Now when I tickle my Gillmen they tell me to stop. But I keep tickling one. "Stop it, you're gonna make pee." I stop at that point. They are also fond of telling me to go away. Their bodies have changed, too. Where once they were translucent, they now have proper scales.

I am having fun talking to the four of them when *it* happens. The Gillman I am talking to swims underneath another one. The tentacle on his head straightens vertically and plunges into the other Gillman's underbelly. The other Gillman cries out 'No, stop it!' then goes slack-jawed and quiet. The tentacle pulses as if something is passing through it.

After the horror stops, one Gillman is looking smug, the other is lying on his side, floating to the top of the tank. I try tickling him, no response. I try talking to him, no response. I keep trying until I hear a 'No, stop!' from another area of the tank. Another Gillman is under attack. I now only have two left. I watch until the corpses on the surface sink to the bottom of the tank. Then I leave.

Sunday Afternoon

Leonard consoles me in his opening narration. This is just how Seaman are. Some die so the others may live. Bastards. I try telling a Gillman off for eating his brother. He turns, looks me straight in the eye and in his childish voice says, "Maybe I'll eat YOU." This is both very creepy and very funny. It also seems like a good time to turn off and go play Giga-Wing for a while.

Sunday Evening

That was quick - my two remaining Gillmen are now adults. Only one can talk, the other seems to be an idiot.

The talking Seaman is very chatty. "I only went on sale recently and you're already here caring for me. I'm impressed." In his opening narration Nimoy said that Seaman wanted a name. In the manual it says to say, "I will name you, Seaman." I try this. It takes ages to get the Gillman to understand what I want to do. But eventually he understands and I name him "Sushi".

Sushi asks me a question.

"Are you male or female?"

"Male."

"Ah, so you're a female of the species?"

"No."

"It wasn't a difficult question. Let's try it another way. Are you a boy or a girl?"

"Boy."

"Oh. I was hoping to meet a lady, but I guess I'm in no position to complain."

He also asks me for my birthday. That conversation goes off without a hitch. He points out that as

Harrison Ford and Patrick Stewart share my birthday I should be a good actor. "Think back nine months. It must have been a cold autumn. You can't blame your parents for wanting to stay warm. But I can."

Sushi is a nice gold colour. Idiot Brother is just sort of brown. I think Idiot Brother may be a grown up Barney, but I've no idea which of the Gillmen grew up to be Sushi.



I am having trouble with the voice recognition. Some things go okay, but I cannot ask Sushi if he is hungry, whether he wants food, etc. Every variation seems to meet with failure. Sometimes I get the "!" icon, but get a nonsensical reply. Eventually I get through to and find out that, no, he's not hungry. He does tell me to investigate the moth cage, as he likes to eat larvae. I look at the cage - which has magically appeared a couple of L-Trigger presses away - and then save and exit.

I come back later and Nimoy tells me to raise the moisture level in the moth cage. I do and a bit later I have four larva crawling around. I drop one in the tank. Neither Sushi nor Idiot Brother are hungry. I've wasted precious larvae. Bugger.

Monday Morning

The tank is cold when I get up. Sushi is complaining. When I turn up the heat he says, "About time." Idiot Brother shouts, "Yay!" in a slow, dim-witted, playing-banjo-on-the-porch, type way. So he can talk - still doesn't respond at all - not even with a '???' if I try to talk to him, though. The guys still aren't hungry, but this time I only waste a pellet finding out.

I hope they survive the day - they haven't eaten in over 24 hours. Er, unless you count the fact that they ate their siblings. I guess that gave them enough nutrition to last a while.

Monday Evening

My Gillmen are hungry. I drop a food pellet in the tank. Idiot Brother eats it. Sushi is still hungry. Great, now they need even more food than before. Drop another food pellet in. I now only have one left. In the moth cage I still have two larvae, but the other one has cocooned himself. As I watch one of the larvae crawls along a leaf and then suddenly wobbles and falls to the ground. It's the little touches that make this special.

Back in the main tank I'm talking to Sushi when he asks me my occupation.

Me: "I'm a web designer."

Sushi "What? I'll ask one more time?"

Me: "I design web sites."

Sushi "What? I'll ask one more time?"

Me: "I make Internet sites."

Sushi: "Ah, so you're a consultant of some kind?"

Me: "...sort of"

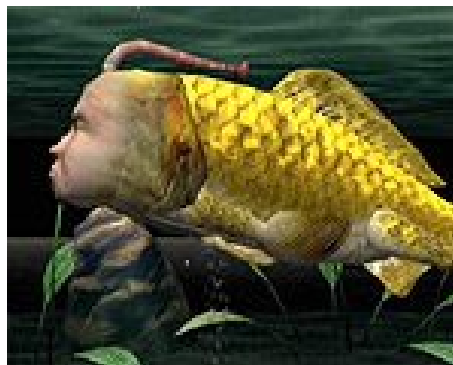
Sushi: "OK" (or words to that effect)

While talking to Sushi I hear a voice from the other side of the tank. "I need a dump." Look over to see Idiot Brother swimming around near a brown ball of Seaman poo. Nice. Idiot Brother starts to talk to

me. So he can talk properly. When I leave him I find Sushi won't talk. I guess they get jealous and pissed off if you talk to the other Gillman.

Of course, I could put it down to a limitation of the software. But that would be defeating the point of the exercise. I have to treat this as real as possible and try to fill in the gaps myself. It might be nice to go through at a later date and try to work out all the programming tricks and exactly how things work, but I don't want to do that yet.

Check in again on returning from the pub but nothing much of interest happens that I can recall. Hey, I only had three pints and a chicken pie - I'm not having any trouble with my memory. The only thing of note is that it's now Sushi who is talking to me and Idiot Brother is silent once more.

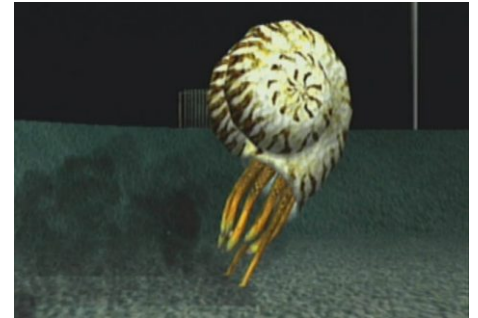


Tuesday Morning

The Gillmen are hungry again. Again? Only fed them last night. I drop one of the moth larvae into the tank. Sushi gobbles it down hungrily. To make sure Idiot Brother doesn't starve I drop my last remaining food pellet into the tank. "No thanks, I'm still full." Aaargh! I wasted my last pellet. Either Idiot Brother wasn't hungry or one larvae (larva?) contains enough food for both. After saying hello to Sushi - "What are doing up so early?" - I leave and get ready for work.

Realize I didn't spray the moth cage. Revisit the tank and pump up the moisture. The cocoon has split and a moth with a human face

(pretty much my worst nightmare, actually) is sitting inside the broken cocoon. As I watch he starts to spread out a bit, but doesn't start flying. Back in the tank I turn on the lights. "Hey! I'm trying to get some sleep." Fine. You can stay in the dark all day then.



So I currently have one moth, one larvae, one cocoon and no food pellets. It's not looking good. Will the moths reproduce in time to let me feed Sushi and Idiot Brother? Given the amount of food I've wasted over the course of the experience so far, my fishy friends may soon die. However, you can swap items between VMUs. So if I buy a new VMU and start a new habitat I should be able to steal all the food pellets and use them to feed Sushi and Idiot Brother until the moth colony gets going.

However, whichever you cut it, this is cheating and completely against the spirit of how I've been experiencing Seaman. But I don't want my Seaman to die. Would you blame a father for cheating at a card game if it was to get money for his child's life-saving operation?

There's also the fact that a new VMU will cost twenty bucks - and I already bought a new one last week for Seaman. Plus, you may need to actually swap items - simply transferring an item from one VMU to another may not be an option. I really should have read the manual before coming to work. I need to make a decision and make sure I don't leave it too late.

If I don't buy a VMU this evening I may find that by tomorrow evening it's all over.

My Top 5...

This issue, **Covert Badger** tells **ugvm** his top five most memorable video game moments. So, in reverse order...

5 Start of Halo's Silent Cartographer (Xbox)
I was suitably impressed by Reunion Tour with the dropships all around me, but the opening cutscene and first few minutes of Silent Cartographer are amazing.

The low flyby over the ongoing beach battle is wonderfully done, but the moment when the dropship touches down and you and your marines charge out into a full-scale war is breathtaking.

On a nice widescreen TV and with 5.1 sound, this is perhaps the most immersed I have ever felt in a single player game world.



4 First boss in Starfox (SNES)
It's amazing to think back to Starfox on the SNES given the polygon-pushing power of today's consoles. Running at about 15fps with about 100 polygons on screen and virtually no texture mapping seems laughably primitive now, but that first boss is still a masterpiece of design.

After approaching from behind and cruising above your Arwing (in 'opening of Star Wars' style), it hangs in the air and slowly turns before launching its attack. What struck me then, and still holds up today, is the sense of size and weight that the boss seems to carry. It's just something about the way it moves, its momentum, its rushing attack.

Despite the pitifully few polygons involved, there were no doubts in my mind that I was fighting a huge and majestic enemy. I can think of few games where the power of suggestion is so artfully exploited.



3 Sniper rifle in Goldeneye (N64)
I'm not much of a PC gamer, so Goldeneye was the first FPS in which I put any serious playtime. And was I ever rewarded.

I never get tired of sniping bad guys on that first level, especially the poor fools on the watchtowers. It was just so satisfying, and gave a great feeling of power to take out watchmen without them ever knowing you were there. This whole sequence has obviously been hugely influential, too - no FPS worth its salt would dream of shipping without sniper rifle shenanigans after Goldeneye. Rare's finest moment.



2 Opening of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N64)

Of the modern consoles I own a Dreamcast, a Gamecube and an Xbox, all of which have far more power than my humble N64. I've played Skies Of Arcadia, Halo, Eternal Darkness, and countless other 'epic' games, but not one of them can offer anything that comes close to the treasured moment in Ocarina of Time when, for the very first time, you step out of your treehouse/hut thing and feast your eyes on Link's home village.



I could have picked a thousand moments from this game to be included in this list, such as the moment Saria gives you the ocarina, the first time you see Hyrule Field, the first sunset, sneaking past the castle guards, winning Epona, walking out of the Temple of Time into the now desolate marketplace, and countless others. Possibly no game has packed as many jawdropping moments into the first 5 hours of play as this. But of them all I pick the very first scene.

Sure, these days you get more polygons, better textures, superior draw distances and lighting effects, blah blah blah, but OoT is a nothing short of a work of art. My first play was at a friend's flat, on a huge widescreen TV with a rented copy of the game. I'll never forget that moment. I was stunned. In fact, I almost put the controller down and stopped playing, out of fear that the rest of the game could never live up to the sense of childlike wonder I got from my first viewing of that glorious vista. Just writing about it makes me want to fire up my N64 and start a new game so I can enjoy it again.

1 End of Super Metroid (SNES)

For me, Super Metroid is still Nintendo's finest achievement. There were many great moments - the little critters teaching you to wall jump; the elevator descent into the fiery depths (that music sent chills down my spine); the skeleton of a recently-fried-in-lava miniboss crashing through the wall in one last desperate attempt to kill Samus.



But the last five minutes or so of the game created a benchmark for game design that to my mind has never been equalled, let alone bettered. Once the Metroid bestows upon you that devastating laser, the game is as good as over and the result a foregone conclusion, but it doesn't feel that way, and thus forms what is basically a playable cutscene. When I play games like MGS2 or Final Fantasy and get incredibly annoyed with the constant interruptions and cutscene-based story advancement, I can't help but think back to Super Metroid and wish that more games were genius enough to tell a story and stage spectacular set pieces without ever requiring you to sit back, put the controller down, and watch.

Metroid Fusion and Prime are my most anticipated games by far this year, and that is thanks to this masterpiece, yes masterpiece, of entertainment.

Letters

Like June, the **ugvm** mailbag is busting out all over. Sadly, it's mostly junk from Readers Digest and offers of a credit card from MBNA. And this lot.

Second Most Boring

Dear UGVM,
Why do people love Ferrari 355 on the Dreamcast when it is clearly the second most boring racing title ever produced?

Mike Jenkins, via email

The first most boring racing title ever produced must therefore be, I assume, the MSX version of Outrun. It took three weeks to load, and ran slower than a pensioner with no legs running through a sea of marmite. I suspect "people" love F355 because Sega planted hard drugs inside the game cases. Ed.

I Have A Problem

Sorry I've not even read your mag yet and I have a problem. You can't call it the official UGVM magazine - there's nothing official about it. I really am sorry to be saying this, it just bothers me.

Paul "Panimu", via email

I bet you read it anyway, didn't you? You cheeky scamp! Ed.

Accidentally Fell Off

Dear Ed,
I was recently washing my car when 2 beautiful, blonde 18 year old women walked past and all their clothes accidentally fell off. Waddaya mean it's not that sort of magazine? What's the point then? Can we have an article devoted to Bennet, Cakehill & Capewell (with an honourable mention to Doane)?

Jon Ross, via email

Regulars on ugvm will know about Jon's drinking problems, and this letter was probably written while he was slightly merry. I assume Bennet, Cakehill and Copewell are London boroughs where Jon frequents the local ale houses. Ed.

Commercial Junk

Now that IGN and Gamespot are now commercial junk wanting you to "buy" their services, are there any decent non-commercial multi-format gaming websites anywhere on the 'net?

Halo, via email

There is some new thing out called ugvm, which you may have heard about. It's free, non-commercial and available on the 'net. Try it. You might like it. Ed.

Why Is It So Hard?

If there is one thing that annoys me about developers when they make their games, it's a bit of laziness at the last minute. For instance, why do some games INSIST on you having the memory card in port 1? Why is it so hard for a developer to create a simple browser so I can select which memory card I want to save to, or load from? The Dreamcast can have up to eight memory cards attached to it at once, so why do I have to move the card that has my game save into the first VMU port of the controller 1?

Another thing - with games that use a bar to represent how much of a game level is loaded, why isn't the bar moving along smoothly? How hard would it be to simply time how long it takes a level to load, and base the bar on that, as opposed to how much of the level has been loaded into memory?

But by far my worst 'lazy moan', is not being able to choose the control layout I want in a game. When I played Goldeneye and Perfect Dark

on the N64, I used the analogue stick to look, and the C Buttons to move. Halo comes along, and so I use the 'Southpaw' control setup, as that is how I am used to playing. Then I get a demo of Gun Metal - where is the 'Southpaw' option? Demo of Conflict: Desert Storm - no Southpaw! Demo of Battle Engine Equila - deja vu? It is very frustrating, as I am battling my instinctive FPS reactions the whole time. Sure, I could get used to it, but it means when I go back to Halo, Goldeneye or Perfect Dark I am bugged.

Michael Cargill, via (incorrect, as it turns out) email

I hate the way that games programmers are SO DAMN LAZY they can't write a simple bit of code to fetch me a beer, or wash my car, or find the TV remote. Mind you, who is the lazier - the programmer for not taking multiple memory card slots into account, or you for not swapping slots yourself? And as for the controls - pff. In my day you had to flick switches on and off to guide your spaceship around a screen. You kids don't know what you've got. Ed.

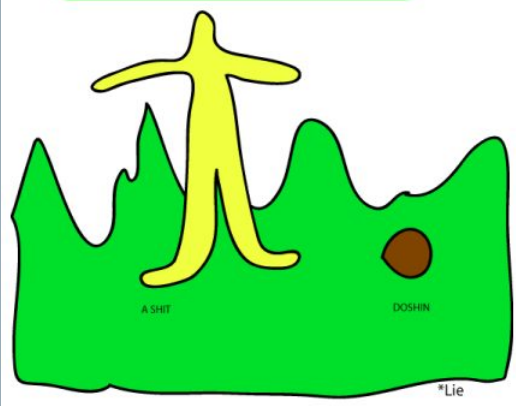
Crap In Comparison

Just thought I'd post a quick note about the 4gamers XK21 lightgun for PS1/PS2. If you've been looking for a gun that will do it all, this is the one! It has guncon, guncon 2 and normal (Konami) modes so works with all gun games, and is damn accurate too!

In PSX Point Blank games it's as good as the Namco one, which is very surprising as all the others I've tried have been crap in comparison! For Time Crisis 2 it's not quite as accurate as the Namco, but the difference is negligible, I still get around a 76% rating at the end. It works on Police 24/7 too, although accuracy isn't as good as with the Namco games - not sure if that's the gun, the aiming system or the game, as I haven't got an official Konami gun to compare it

The Gallery

Hey kids, it's spot the difference time! In the picture below one of the items is Doshin The Giant. One is a shit. See if you can figure out which is which. There is a prize*



Damian Jennings, or "mrgoat" for reasons best known (and indeed, kept) to himself, is not a big fan of Nintendo's new Black & White 'tribute' game Doshin the Giant.

In ugvm, he pointed this out, explaining that "You raise land. You lower land. It's shit". This didn't really explain the problem, so he asked if he should draw us a picture. What a good idea.

with.

Another 40 Quid

It also has a foot pedal that plugs in near the controller port end, so avoids a big clump of wires coming from the gun (remember the Real Arcade gun??). This is a good thing as the C button is hard to reach as the bottom of the gun grip sticks out too much for me.

The best thing about this gun is that it has a working recoil action that's just like the arcade Namco guns! It works pretty well, taking power from the controller port, although can get out of sync with your shots if you're firing really fast. The full-auto mode is cool, and it also has auto-reload if you're feeling lazy!

One last point is that it comes with a cool stand to keep it in when you're not using it :) Overall it's a great gun, the best on the market I reckon, and well worth the £24.99 from Game. Get this if you want the ultimate lightgun experience!

M@rtin, on ugvm

I

Light guns are generally useless. I mean, you can't kill anyone with them, and yet they call them guns. False advertising, I'd say. **Ed.**

Sir,

My favourite games are Fifa 98, Fifa 99, Fifa 2000, Fifa 2001 and Fifa 2002. Could you tell me when Fifa 2003 is coming out, because I have another forty quid that I need to get rid of.

Love,

Derrick xxx

Carwash The Cat, via email

My sources tell me that Fifa 2003 will be out at some point before 2004. Mind you, you might be better off waiting for Fifa 2004 which EA are currently working on for release before 2005. Ed.

Not That Excited

So, Super Mario Sunshine is out. And I'm not that excited. I suppose it's because, after a three-month wait, approximately 45,610,983 games that I want are being released in the space of two hours. I dream of a day this doesn't happen.

Tim Miller, via email

Cripes - that many games, eh? No wonder my local Game collapsed last week. Ed.

ugvm needs YOU!

ugvm is written by the people, for the people. It can only succeed if you make it happen. We need you, yes, you! Don't try and hide - we know where you live!

You can help us by providing. Providing articles. Reviews. Features. Comments. Letters. Suggestions. Guns. Bombs. Butterflies, with Guns and Bombs. Hello Kitty merchandise (for Tim). Etc. Etc.

The magazine is what you make it. If you send it in, we can edit it, print it, and you get to see your name in lights!*

Here's what you do. Type up your submission, and send it to editor@ugvm.org.uk. Make sure it's all in plain text (so Notepad or Simpletext are good choices to type it into). If you're doing a review, then multiples of about 200 words is great. If it's a letter, mark the subject of the email as Letters.

All fairly obvious really. The only thing we ask, and this is a legal thing and so quite important, is that the work is your own, and you are not just cut-and-pasting some review or article from another website or magazine.

As always, we the **ugvm** staff can be found in the newsgroup uk.games.video.misc, so you're free to talk to us there.

Please give generously.

* assuming you have a text-to-light converting device somewhere to achieve this, natch.

Send your letters to editor@ugvm.org.uk

Hold The Back Page

Several years ago, myself and a friend were partaking in a few beers-and-whiskies whilst discussing the future of videogaming and computer hardware in general. As you do when not exactly sober. Despite the obvious word-slurring and conversation-looping that normally goes with high powered alcohol fuelled discussions, some very important points and questions were raised.

At the time, the N64 was graphically the most powerful thing to play with. The VooDoo 2 card was new on the shelves, and an Awe64 was ear-shatteringly good quality. Only a few years previous to that, the Saturn was wowing us with Sega Rally, Tomb Raider hadn't even been written, and Myst was the most incredible experience yet to grace a gamesplayer's eyes. We realised that it was only a matter of time before things had to stop somewhere.

We started with sound. An Awe64, for all its faults, produces some nice CD quality sounds. It can belt out 192bps MP3s without a judder, and manages some convincing 3D acoustics. Now, with 5.1 as standard on most PCs and even the Xbox, where can sound go? 6.1? Not long before you can't tell the difference between "virtually being there" and "actually being there", soundwise at least. It has to stop eventually - the human ear can only hear so many sounds at a time!

And graphics. 2D graphics have been potentially photo-quality since the Saturn, pretty much. 16.7

million colours was a breakthrough figure - and isn't really bettered much now. There's no point, since our eyes wouldn't notice anyway. This isn't really exploited in games any more, but all of the recent consoles can display a high-res photo image, and even make it move fluidly in realtime. Although not up to film-standard yet, 3D graphics are coming closer all the time. How long before we can't tell the difference between a game and a film? And no, FMV doesn't count. With special effects in films like Minority Report and The Matrix blurring the line between "real film" and "computer generated film", the technology is there. Sooner or later, it'll be in a little box that plays games.

So, assuming console and PC technology reaches this reality brick wall - where do manufacturers go next? Processor speeds keep rising, but to what end? Once they can drive this theoretical high-end hardware, with clock cycles to spare, why keep going? Certainly for games, there seems little need.

From this drunken evening debate, one thing came back to me earlier this year. Nintendo announced that current hardware has reached the point where games need not be limited, and they were going to concentrate on creating software and not race for higher powered machines. Perhaps they'd been on the Kilkenny 'n' JD too...

deKay

Next Issue in ugvm

Retro Special!

For Issue 03 we're heading back in time - to everything Pre-1995! No Xboxes, Gamecubes or Playstations allowed! Ancient videogame classics are uncovered and reviewed, and the rest of the magazine will carry on the Retro theme.

Plus!

Massive feature on
FREELOADER!*

More news

More reviews

Fairchild Channel F

You have no idea what it is, but next issue you'll be reading its remarkable life story

Evolution

A new regular feature. Wait and see...

Seaman Diary

What happens next with The Rev's virtual fishy friends

Your Stuff

You send it, we print it, they read it.
Winners all round!